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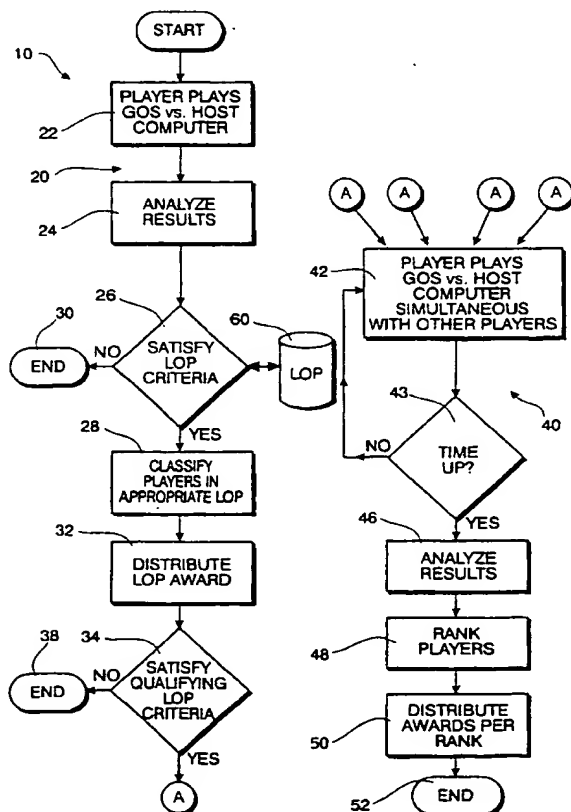
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(54) Title: **METHOD OF STAGING A GAME OF SKILL TOURNAMENT**

(57) **Abstract:** A tournament is staged using an interactive communication system such as the Internet. A plurality of players each compete against a host computer. Each player attempts to score a sufficient number of points to qualify as a superior player compared to others playing in the tournament. A player that obtains an upper level of performance may be recognized for his or her accomplishment and given a reward. This allows the players to each gauge his or her skill level. In an extension of the basic tournament, a selected number or a selected percent of players can qualify to enter a playoff. In the playoff, players may again compete against a host computer and final contestants are selected as those achieving the highest levels of play. In a further extension of the tournament a limited number of finalists are selected by computer and are matched against each other, as contrasted to being matched against a host computer. Player verses player continues in elimination fashion.

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METHOD OF STAGING A GAME OF SKILL TOURNAMENT

Background of the Invention

The present invention is directed to a game of skill tournament. Specifically, the present invention is directed to a tournament having a qualifying round and a playoff round, and played on an interactive computer system. The qualifying round is played between a player through a computer terminal and a host computer. The playoff round is played
5 between those players which have obtained a predetermined level of performance and a host computer. This round is played under the same rules and conditions as in the qualifying round except all players are playing simultaneously within a specific time frame on a specific date.

Interactive video computer software, the Internet and the public's fascination with
10 the challenge, competitiveness and gratification of computer based video games has increased the need for new games and gaming formats. There exists the need for a gaming format which allows a player to gauge the level of skill he or she possesses as compared to other players, without traveling long distances and incurring the expenses of meeting at a central contest site.

15 For many years, games of skill, such as chess, bridge, poker and blackjack, have attracted tournaments. Various types of tournaments have been created and attempted to satisfy the above mentioned needs. These tournaments involve games such as poker and blackjack. Typically, various rules have been placed upon the individual game. Examples of such attempts are described in the following:

20 U.S. Pat. No. 5,660,392 to Hansen involves a method for playing a blackjack type card game having specific rules regarding the play of the game; U.S. Pat. No. 5,660,391 to

Klasse involves a method for playing blackjack wherein a player wagers whether a hand will be a Blackjack, 21, 20, 19 or 18; U.S. Pat. No. 5,566,946 to Parker involves a method to play blackjack wherein different bets are placed on the Ante and the Play with different odds being placed on same; U.S. Pat. No. 5,755,621 to Marks involves a poker card tournament wherein a player creates a poker hand by first receiving a pair of cards, discarding one of the cards and repeating the process until the hand has been completed. This tournament is played solely between the player and the house computer system or between other players. The prior art game of skill games or tournaments have not been successful. These references do not allow a player to gauge his or her level of performance by allowing the player to test his or her skill and ability against the tournament sponsor and other players during the same tournament. There is a need for a tournament which allows for a player to compete and obtain a reliable index as to his or her skill as compared to other competitors competing under the same game conditions while simultaneously enjoying the game.

Brief Summary of the Invention

In accordance with the present invention, a game of skill tournament having a qualifying round and a playoff round being played over an interactive computer system is disclosed. Generally, the qualifying round is played between a single player and a host computer. The playoff round is played between those players that have obtained a predetermined level of performance during the qualifying round. Awards are distributed to those players who reach specific levels of performance during the qualifying round and to the top scorers of the playoff round.

For purposes of the present invention, a game of skill is defined as any game where a player's knowledge and experience influences the outcome of the game. Examples of games of skill include, but are not limited to chess, poker, bridge, hearts, blackjack and question/answer trivia games.

5 The game of skill tournament is divided into two distinct portions: the qualifying round and the playoff round. The qualifying round is played between a single player through a computer terminal and a host computer. A host computer has the ability to act as a game sponsor by keeping score, operating the game, monitoring the player's progress and distributing awards when appropriate. Also, a host computer has the ability to act as another
10 player if the game requires more than a single player. The object of the qualifying round is to obtain a level of performance that will allow a player to participate in the playoff round. Awards are given to those players reaching various levels of performance during the qualifying round and to the top scorers during the playoff round.

With respect to the levels of performance, there are a plurality of levels ranging from
15 low-performance to high-performance. Typically, there would be a low-performance level, one or more mid-performance levels and a high-performance level.

If a player obtains a result while playing a game of skill during the qualifying round which satisfies a predetermined criteria specific to a level of performance, the player would then be classified a player of that level and would be given an award specific to that level.

20 If a player obtains a result that qualifies him or her to be classified into a level of performance that qualifies him or her to be able to participate in the playoff round, he or she would be eligible to play the game of skill against a host computer in the playoff round. During the playoff round, all players which obtain a specific level of performance would

simultaneously play the game of skill against a host computer under the same rules and conditions as during the qualifying round, except for a specific time limit. Typically, the levels of performance which qualify a player for the playoff round are the highest levels.

After the time limit for the playoff round ends, the results are evaluated, with the
5 players being ranked according to the number of points each obtained during the playoff round. Awards are distributed to those players reaching a predetermined ranking. For example, the winner, second and third place players will each receive different awards.

The game of skill tournament can be played over an electronic system, such as a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), campus-wide network, fixed-based
10 unit network, Intranet, Internet, dial-up connection, satellite communication, interactive television or other communication architecture and protocol capable of facilitating human and computer-based interaction.

The primary object of the present invention is to create a game of skill tournament which improves upon the prior art tournaments.

15 Another object of the present invention is to create a game of skill tournament which challenges the participants and reward those participants who obtain a certain level of performance.

Other objects and a further scope of the applicability of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description to follow taken in conjunction with the
20 accompanying drawings wherein like parts are designated by like reference numerals.

The game of skill tournament can be played, as hereintofore discussed, in which all players compete against a host computer and in which all players, after one or more games, achieve a level of performance or a level of play that is ranked according to other players

in the tournament. The tournament can include, as heretofore mentioned, two distinct levels – that is, a preliminary level and a playoff level in which a plurality of players compete against a host computer, and wherein a host computer registers the level of play of each participant. In one way of practicing the invention, the tournament can be concluded after
5 all players have each participated in a predetermined number of games and awards can be granted to the players having the highest level of play or highest points. That is, wherein the tournament is conducted in such a way that there is no playoff and in which each player that enters the tournament has an equal chance to the game's end to play at a level that will entitle him or her to an award. On the other hand, the tournament can be played, as
10 hereintofores discussed, after a predetermined time or a predetermined number of games, players having the highest level of accomplishment can continue to play in a playoff round while those having lower levels of accomplishment are excluded from play in the playoff round. In the playoff round, the tournament may be conducted in a similar fashion – that is, where each player in the playoff competes against a host computer and the playoff
15 players achieving the highest levels of performance are acknowledged and given awards. In an alternate method of playing the invention as contemplated herein, the system in which a playoff is employed, players in the playoff may compete against each other – that is, rather than each player competing against a host computer in all stages of the tournament, in the final stages the tournament may be arranged so that the highest achieving players are
20 matched by a computer in real time, to play against each other. The tournament is completed by the players playing against each other and the ultimate winner or winners are awarded. In this method of conducting a tournament, play against a computer by a multitude of players is employed to evaluate players and thereby, in a playoff portion of the

5 tournament, the final group of the most highly skilled players then play against each other rather than each playing against a host computer. This method of conducting a tournament adds an increased sense of accomplishment for the ultimate winner or winners since they will know that they have demonstrated their superior level of play first against a host computer to thereby be chosen for a playoff round and, in the final stages of the playoff round, have succeeded by defeating other players. skilled players -- that is, in the final rounds, players are required to defeat other players rather than excel against a host computer.

Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a flow chart of an alternate embodiment of the invention illustrating the method of play of a tournament in which in preliminary rounds players play against a host computer but in the final stages of the tournament players having demonstrated superiority
5 are matched player against player to determine the final winner or winners.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

In accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention as shown in Figure 1, a method directed toward a game of skill tournament 10 having a qualifying round 20 and a playoff round 40 is generally disclosed. A least one player participates in the qualifying round 20 against a host computer. The playoff round 40 is played by those
5 players that have obtained a predetermined level of performance during the qualifying round 20 against a host computer. Awards are distributed to those players who reach specific levels of performance during the qualifying round and to those players in the playoff round who obtain the highest score. The awards can be distributed either instantaneously or can be made available to be received by the recipient at some time in future.

10 The game of skill tournament first begins with at least one player playing a game of skill against a host computer in the qualifying round 20 as shown in box 22. The maximum number of participants during the qualifying round 20 is open-ended. The only restriction on the number of participants would be specific to the particular game of skill being played. The game of skill can be any game of skill that requires the player to utilize his or her
15 knowledge and experience to affect the outcome of the game. Examples of games of skill include but are not limited to chess, poker, bridge, hearts, blackjack and question/answer trivia.

The object of the qualifying round 20 is to obtain a sufficient number of points during the course of play which satisfies a predetermined criteria for a level of performance.
20 Qualifying round 20 can be only a single game or a series of games. Once a player completes a game or round of games in which he obtains sufficient points which would classify him or her in the top most level of performance, the player would not have to

continue with additional qualifying games or rounds of games.

Once the player completes play against the host computer, the results are analyzed as shown in box 24. The results are compared to a predetermined list of levels of performance 60, as shown in box 26. If the results satisfy predetermined criteria, the player
5 will be classified into the level of performance that matches his or her results, as shown in box 28. If the player's results do not meet a minimum level of performance, the player will be eliminated from the tournament as shown in box 30. If a player is classified into a level of performance, an award specific to the specific level of performance is distributed to the player, as shown in box 32.

10 If a player is eliminated from the tournament, he or she has the ability to begin a new qualifying round. The reasons for beginning a new qualifying round include attempting to qualify for the minimum level of performance, qualifying for a higher level of performance and/or receive additional rewards.

If a player is classified into a level of performance that would qualify him or her to
15 participate in the playoff round 40, the player will advance, as shown in box 34. Typically, these qualifying levels of performance are reserved for the highest levels of performance. If the player's level of performance does not meet the predetermined qualifying level of performance, the player will be eliminated from the tournament, as shown in box 38. As mentioned above, the player would be able to begin a new qualifying round in order to
20 attempt to reach a level of performance that would allow participation in the playoff round 40.

Typically the qualifying round is played in a continuous manner. By this it is meant that the player selects the day and time in which to participate. The only limitations to this

time frame are if the qualifying round is not active. An example of this is illustrated as follows: The tournament is open for a qualifying round playoff from Monday at noon to Saturday at midnight. Any player would have the ability to participate in the qualifying round at the time of choice as long as it was between the pre-established time frame.

5 The playoff round 40 will begin at a preset time with those players who have qualified by a specific cut-off date and time playing the game of skill against a host computer, as shown in box 42. The playoff round will continue for a preset amount of time also shown in step 42. After the playoff round is concluded, the results are analyzed as shown in step 46. The results are analyzed to determine each player's score. The players are
10 ranked according to performance, as shown in step 52. An award is then distributed to those players who have reached attained the predetermined top scores in the playoff, as shown in step 53. The tournament then ends.

Example of Preferred Embodiment

An example of the preferred embodiment of the present invention is set forth below.

15 The parameters of the example are for illustrative purposes only. They are not intended to limit the scope of the invention. The game of skill will be set as Hearts. The tournament will be played over the Internet, where a host computer and participants' terminals are each in different locations. The qualifying round is open for play seven days a week, twenty-four hours per day. The playoff round is to be played on each Saturday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
20 GMT. The playoff qualifying cutoff date and time is Saturday at noon, GMT.

The predetermined levels of performance are set out below in Table 1.

Table 1

Level	Minimum Points	Award
Bronze	200	X
Silver	300	2X
Gold	400	3X
Platinum	500	4X

Points are earned based on winning rounds of play. The qualifying levels of performance include the Gold and Platinum levels.

Four players start the qualifying round against a host computer. Since the tournament is played over the Internet, each player is able to participate at a variety of locations at the time of his or her choosing prior to noon on Saturday.

A host computer is represented by a computer system having compatible hardware and software. The location of a host computer system can be a different location than the locations of each player. Through a series of two-way communications, the game of skill is conducted between the players and a host computer system.

After each player has completed the qualifying round the results are analyzed. The results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Player	Score	Classification	Award	Advance
A	75	None	None	No
B	250	Bronze	X	No
C	400	Gold	3X	Yes
D	525	Platinum	4X	Yes

The results show that Player A had 75 points, Player B had 250 points, Player C had 450 points and Player D had 525 points.

Player A does not satisfy the minimum level of performance, thus, Player A is eliminated from the tournament. Player B meets the criteria for the Bronze level of performance. Player C meets the criteria for the Gold level of performance. Player D meets the criteria for the Platinum level of performance. A host computer system distributes level of performance specific awards to Players B, C and D. However, only players C and D advance to the playoff round against other qualified players of equal level.

At the predetermined time on Saturday, Player C then plays the game of skill in the playoff round against a host computer simultaneously with other Gold level players. Player D plays the game of skill in the playoff round against a host computer simultaneously with other Platinum level players. A host computer system analyzes the results of the Gold and Platinum level playoff rounds. The players are then ranked according to their specific performance during the playoff round.

Assume Players C and D are ranked first and third in their respective divisions. A host computer would distribute an award to Player C specific to his or her first place ranking in the Gold playoff round and an award to Player D specific to his or her third place ranking in the Platinum playoff round.

The invention has been described hereinabove as it is particularly employed in conducting a tournament in which the tournament has two basic sections – that is, a preliminary section and a playoff section. In the practice of the invention as described up to this point, a plurality of players, which can be many in number such as hundreds or thousands, participate in a preliminary round each playing against a host computer as indicated in a block 22 of Figure 1. The results are analyzed as indicated in block 24 and the level of performance is evaluated in block 26.

Block 28 indicates that the players are then classified in levels of play or that is, players are evaluated to judge each player's performance relative to a predetermined standard or relative to the performance of all of the players in the tournament as a whole. Players that demonstrate an upper level of play may be given an award as indicated in 32. The awards can vary according to the level of play of the winning players so that the players that have demonstrated the greatest level of play in games to which all of the players of the tournament have participated can be given greater awards. The tournament can end at this point – that is, at the end of block 32 with awards being distributed to those players in the tournament showing the highest level of accomplishment. The significance of this arrangement is that the tournament does not require two segments – that is, it does not require a first segment or preliminary round followed by a playoff round. The tournament can be successfully accomplished and awards given without any players being eliminated from subsequent play.

Figure 2 shows an alternate method of conducting a tournament according to the principles of this invention. The first part of the flow chart of Figure 2 is a duplicate of that of Figure 1 showing the same sequence of steps through the ranking of players indicated by the numeral 52. The game, as illustrated in Figure 2, is different than as described with

reference to Figure 1 in that in the last phases of a tournament, as structured according to Figure 2, final winners are determined by players playing against each other rather than all play being against a host computer as contemplated in tournaments structured according to Figure 1. In Figure 2, after a preliminary portion of a tournament has been conducted and
5 players selected for a playoff round, tournament rounds are then staged among the playoff contenders to pare the list of high achievers to a relatively small number. As an example, a tournament may initially involve thousands of participants. After a given round of play, a selected percentage of participants are eliminated from further play and play continues in a playoff with a smaller number, which still could be in the hundreds. These players play
10 against a host computer as indicated by block 42 for a given length of time. At the conclusion of the selected length of time, the results are analyzed as indicated in block 50 and all but the pre-selected number of highest ranking players are eliminated as indicated at block 52. The top performing players or finalists are selected at 62. The selected ones being predicated upon the demonstrated level of performance of the players through the
15 playoff portion of the tournament as illustrated in blocks 42, 46, 50 and 52. The selected finalists are then paired against each other. The number of selected finalists is predetermined and can be as few as four to as many as desired, such as eight, sixteen or thirty-two. By means of a host computer, the finalist players are matched against each other at 64. A host computer may match the players at 64 either by arbitrary matching or can
20 match the players according to their rankings. The matching can take place such as the highest ranked player playing the lowest ranked player; the second highest ranked player playing the next to the lowest ranked player and so forth in the same way that typical college basketball tournaments are played with higher rank seeds playing lower ranked seeds in an elimination process. Irrespective of the particular means of matching the players, they are

pitted against each other and the tournament continues as player verses player play in elimination fashion as indicated by block 66.

The player against player format continues as defeated players are eliminated to determine the final winner or winners. That is, the tournament can be continued until there is a single overall winner or can be continued until there is a limited number of survivors such as two or four that share in the maximum awards as indicated by block 68.

The advantage of the method of staging a game of skill tournament as diagramed in Figure 2 is that it permits a large number of participants, such as hundreds or thousands, to play in a tournament that can be concluded in a relatively short period of time such as a few hours to a few days. In this relatively short length of time the large number of participants each competed against a host computer so that the best players and inferior players are quickly identified. The best players then move into a playoff round where again, the number of participants may be relatively large and the participants play against a host computer to narrow the field down to a relatively small number of players that have demonstrated superior abilities. This relatively small number of players are then matched against each other (instead of against a host computer) and the play continues until one or relatively few survive as the overall most superior players of all the entries into the tournament.

It is apparent that matching player against player is more difficult and time consuming than the situation in which all players play against a host computer and therefore the advantage of the tournament system of Figure 2 is that the matching of player against player is reserved to match only those few players that have demonstrated superiority of the game being played while the vast majority of plays take place in which players compete against a host computer.

One of the criteria of their invention is to restrict or eliminate the opportunity for collusion between players. Player against computer fulfills this objective, and the computer matching of tournament playoff finalist only moments before they compete live, but from distance locations, also satisfies this objective.

5 Individuals interested in participating in a game of skill tournament are first required to join a club which requires a moderate annual membership fee and submission of registration information. The information includes, for each participant, a credit card registration, e-commerce, direct banking information or check. Each participant is issued a secure personal identification number (PIN number). Members of the club each choose
10 a tournament he or she wishes to enter and makes a deposit to his or her account, the deposit being charged to his or her credit card, an e-commerce transaction or other acceptable means of monetary transactions.

As the tournament begins each player attempts to accumulate the most points by his or her score playing against a host computer. A host computer is not programmed with the
15 intent to beat players, on the contrary, the function of a host computer is to provide a worthy adversary. In this way, the ability of each tournament entrant can be ascertained with a high degree of accuracy.

Each round usually consists of three to seven hands {as an example, if the game is a game of Hearts} or three to seven questions, plays or other designations depending on the
20 game or the contest selected. If the tournament is played without a playoff then each player's objective is to accumulate within a specified time limit through the playing of multiple hands, rounds or sets, the highest cumulative number of earned points or scores. Ranking points may be awarded along the way but in most instances, if there is no playoff the ranking will be ignored and the tournament winner awards will go to those who have

earned the highest total number of points at the end of tournament play. Most tournaments of this type without a playoff will be held within a relatively short time frame such as an hour or, at the longest, a day. However, there could be a number of variations such as an hour of play per day for seven consecutive days, or one hundred rounds played anytime
5 during a designated thirty (30) day contest.

If the tournament features a playoff the player's objective is through a combination of skill and point-management, to multiply the points with which they begin the round to the pre-designated number of points to qualify them for a ranking level. Prizes can be awarded to players for achieving a ranking level. Higher rankings would earn better prizes.
10 The player's second objective, if it is a playoff tournament, is to accumulate enough points to earn one of the rankings that will qualify them to enter the playoff. Players will qualify and enter the playoff then proceed in the playoff portion of the tournament. Non-qualifiers are not eligible to participate in the playoff.

In the tournament arrangement illustrated in Figure 2, the playoff portion starts with
15 box 42. Players play against a computer and the superior players are selected at box 62. The finalists are matched against each other to determine a final winner or winners at box 66 and awards are distributed as indicated by box 68.

The methods of staging a game of skill tournament as contemplated by this invention can take the following major paths. First, the tournament is conducted for a preselected
20 length of time in which all players each individually compete against a host computer and the score of each player is totaled so that at the end of the tournament, winners are determined by the total score accumulated. A second method of conducting a tournament requires that all entries play a given number of games or for a given length of time, all playing against a host computer. After a given number of games, players demonstrating a

lower skill level are dropped from the tournament, that is, they failed to qualify for a playoff portion of the tournament. The top tier of players -- that is, those who have qualified for a playoff, continue the tournament. All players that make the playoff round each play against a host computer for a given number of games and awards are then given to the playoff
5 contestants that accumulate the highest scores in the playoff. The third method of playing a tournament according to this invention is illustrated specifically in Figure 2 wherein all the participants first play against a host computer. Their objective is to accumulate within a game or round the points necessary to reach a pre-determined level of performance, which qualifies them for a ranking. Those who achieve the highest or one of the highest rankings
10 are then eligible to play a playoff portion of the tournament while those that are not selected are ineligible for further play. In the initial phase of the playoff portion, the players are each playing against a host computer. In the final phase, the top most players then each play against each other.

The majority of all playoff tournaments will likely have all players playing against
15 a host computer just like the qualifying phase of the tournament with all contestants, or flights of contestants, playing simultaneously for a specific period of time. Playoffs can be arranged to be worldwide in scope or playoffs can be arranged on a regional basis in consideration of various time zones and in order to award more prizes. Various language playoffs can be arranged such as if the game being played is in the Trivia area. Thus, the
20 arrangements of tournaments can vary considerably keeping within the spirit and scope of the invention as disclosed herein.

The claims and the specification describe the invention presented and the terms that are employed in the claims draw their meaning from the use of such terms in the specification. The same terms employed in the prior art may be broader in meaning than

specifically employed herein. Whenever there is a question between the broader definition of such terms used in the prior art and the more specific use of the terms herein, the more specific meaning is meant.

While the invention has been described with a certain degree of particularity, it is
5 manifest that many changes may be made in the details of construction and the arrangement of components without departing from the spirit and scope of this disclosure. It is understood that the invention is not limited to the embodiments set forth herein for purposes of exemplification, but is to be limited only by the scope of the attached claim or claims, including the full range of equivalency to which each element thereof is entitled.

What is claimed:

- 1 1. A method of playing a game of skill tournament over an interactive computer
2 system having a host computer in communication with a plurality of terminal
3 computers with the use of appropriately configured software, the method
4 comprising:
 - 5 a. registering a plurality of tournament participants each having available to
6 him or her a computer terminal;
 - 7 b. securing from each participant a tournament entry fee;
 - 8 c. matching each participant against a host computer that is programmed to
9 serve as a worthy adversary;
 - 10 d. calculating by the host computer, a score for each game played by each
11 player;
 - 12 e. totaling the individual game scores for each individual player to provide a
13 total game, round of games or tournament score for each player;
 - 14 f. comparing the total game score of all the individual players to determine the
15 top players having demonstrated superior levels of play; and
16 g. awarding a prize or prizes to the top player or players.
- 1 2. The method of playing a game of skill tournament according to claim 1
2 including, after step (f) of conducting a tournament playoff of only said top
3 players by repeating steps (c) through (g) for said top players and awarding
4 prizes to a playoff winner or winners.

1 3. A method of playing a game of skill tournament according to claim 1 including.
2 after step (f) of conducting a tournament playoff of only said top players
3 matched by computer selection against each other (rather than against said host
4 computer) in tournament fashion and awarding prizes to the playoff winner or
5 winners.

1 4. A method of playing a game of skill tournament according to claim 1 including,
2 after step (f) of conducting a tournament playoff of only said top players
3 individually playing against said host computer by repeating steps (c) through
4 (f) to determine superior players, and in further playoff tournament fashion
5 matching said superior players against each other (rather than against said host
6 computer) and awarding prizes to the winner or winners.

1 5. A method for effectuating and facilitating a game of skill tournament
2 comprising:
3 a. establishing a tournament gaming dialog between a host computer and a
4 plurality of tournament players;
5 b. registering said tournament players to engage in said tournament gaming
6 dialog;
7 c. providing a plurality of gaming options to said tournament players;
8 d. accepting recognized gaming options from said tournament players;
9 e. facilitating gaming interaction between said tournament players and said
10 host computer;

- 11 f. evaluating results of said gaming interaction between said tournament
12 players and said host computer; and
13 g. awarding a prize or prizes to a player or players having superior results.

- 1 6. The method of claim 5 wherein said facilitating of gaming interaction further
2 comprises:
3 a. creating game rules applicable to a said accepted game option;
4 b. communicating said game rules to said tournament players;
5 c. evaluating results of said player's score at the conclusion of said gaming
6 facilitation, said evaluation indicating a player's expertise level relative to
7 other players; and
8 d. distributing to players meeting pre-defined game rules expertise levels and
9 awards.

- 1 7. The method of claim 5 wherein said registering further comprises:
2 a. identifying each said tournament player; and
3 b. validating and accepting a participation fee from each player.

- 1 8. The method of claim 7 wherein said facilitating of gaming interaction further
2 comprises:
3 a. creating game rules applicable to a said accepted game option;
4 b. communicating said game rules to said tournament players;

- 5 c. evaluating results of said player's score at the conclusion of said gaming
6 facilitation, said evaluation indicating a player's expertise level relative to
7 other players; and
8 d. distributing to players meeting pre-defined game rules expertise levels and
9 awards.

1 9. The method of claim 6 wherein said facilitating of gaming instructions being
2 further defined as having a qualifying tournament round and playoff tournament
3 round, said qualifying tournament round occurring between said tournament
4 player and said host computer, said playoff tournament round occurring between
5 said host computer and those players meeting said pre-defined game rules
6 expertise levels.

1 10. The method of claim 9 wherein said facilitating of gaming instructions further
2 comprises:
3 evaluating results of said player's score at the conclusion of said qualifying
4 tournament round, said evaluation indicating a player's expertise level relative
5 to other player scores.

1 11. The method of claim 9 wherein said facilitating of gaming instruction further
2 comprises;
3 evaluating results of said player's score at the conclusion of said playoff
4 tournament round;

5 said evaluation indicating the highest player's scores;
6 establishing gaming interaction between said highest players, said gaming
7 interaction being facilitated by said host computer;
8 evaluating results of said player's score at the conclusion of said playoff round;
9 said
10 evaluation indicating the highest player's scores; and
11 distributing awards to said highest players.

- 12 12. A method of playing a game of skill tournament having a qualifying round and
13 a playoff round, and played over an interactive computer system, said interactive
14 computer system having a host computer system, a plurality of terminals
15 computers and compatible software, said method comprising the following steps:
16 a. playing a game of skill in a qualifying round between a single player and the
17 host computer;
18 b. evaluating the results of said qualifying round to determine if said player
19 qualifies to be classified within a specific performance level from a plurality
20 of performance levels ranging from a low performance level to a high
21 performance level;
22 c. evaluating the results of said qualifying round to determine if said player
23 qualifies to be classified within a qualifying performance level taken from
24 said plurality of performance levels;
25 d. distributing to said player a performance level award, said performance level
26 award being dependent upon the specific performance level obtained;

- 27 e. playing said game of skill in a playoff round between said player and the
28 host computer simultaneously along with other players, wherein each player
29 has been classified within a qualifying performance level;
- 30 e. evaluating the results of said playoff round to determine a tournament
31 winner and subsequent ranking of players; and
- 32 f. distributing tournament awards to tournament participants.

1 13. The method of claim 12 wherein said interactive computer system is selected
2 from the group consisting of a local area network (LAN), wide area network
3 (WAN), campus-wide network, fixed based unit network, Intranet or Internet.

1 14. The method of claim 12 wherein said qualifying round is defined as a plurality
2 of individual games and the results of said qualifying round is an aggregate of
3 the results of each individual game.

1 15. The method of claim 12 wherein said performance level award increases as a
2 player qualifies for higher performance level classifications.

1 16. The method of claim 12 wherein said qualifying performance level as recited in
2 subparagraph (d) is further defined as being the highest performance level.

1 17. The method of claim 12 wherein said plurality of performance levels is further
2 defined as having four performance levels ranging from a low performance level

3 to a medium-low performance level to a medium-high performance level to a
4 high performance level.

1 18. The method of claim 15 wherein said qualifying performance level is further
2 defined as being the medium-high and highest performance levels.

1 19. The method of claim 12 wherein said step (b) and step (c) are performed
2 simultaneously.

1 20. The method of claim 12 wherein said game of skill is further defined as a card
2 game requiring skill and knowledge.

1 21. The method of claim 18 wherein said card game is selected from the group
2 consisting of rummy, gin rummy, poker, bridge, pinochle, bezique, piquet,
3 klüberjass, julepe, boure, cribbage, casino, euchre, napoleon, two hand five
4 hundred, spoil five, ecarte, hearts, cans, seven-up, draw seven, auction pitch,
5 blackjack, pontoon, fifteen, van john, seven and a half, ten and a half, pong,
6 maco, chemin de fer, baccarat, skin game, horse race, eights, sharnery, sharney
7 gin, doctor videtti, tableanette, and solitaire.

1 22. The method of claim 12 wherein said game of skill is further defined as a
2 question and answer game requiring skill and knowledge.

1 23. The method of claim 20 wherein said trivia game is selected from the group
2 consisting of geography, history, motion picture, science, bible, literature,
3 fictional writings, nonfictional writings, musicians, writers, composers, actors,
4 statesmen, military battles, military leaders, mathematical problems,
5 mathematical formulas, fine arts, horticulture, agriculture, medicine, television
6 shows, spelling, phrase origins, word origins, science-fiction, sporting events,
7 athletics, anatomy and astronomy.

1 24. The method of claim 12 wherein said game of skill is further defined as a
2 strategy game requiring skill and knowledge.

1 25. The method of claim 22 wherein said strategy game is selected from the group
2 consisting of crosswords, word search, word scramble, word match, chess, maze
3 games, computer generated sporting games, player participation sports including
4 virtual sporting events, video sporting events and computer based sporting
5 events, player participation virtual reality games, player participation action
6 games, dominos, checkers, pinball and foosball.

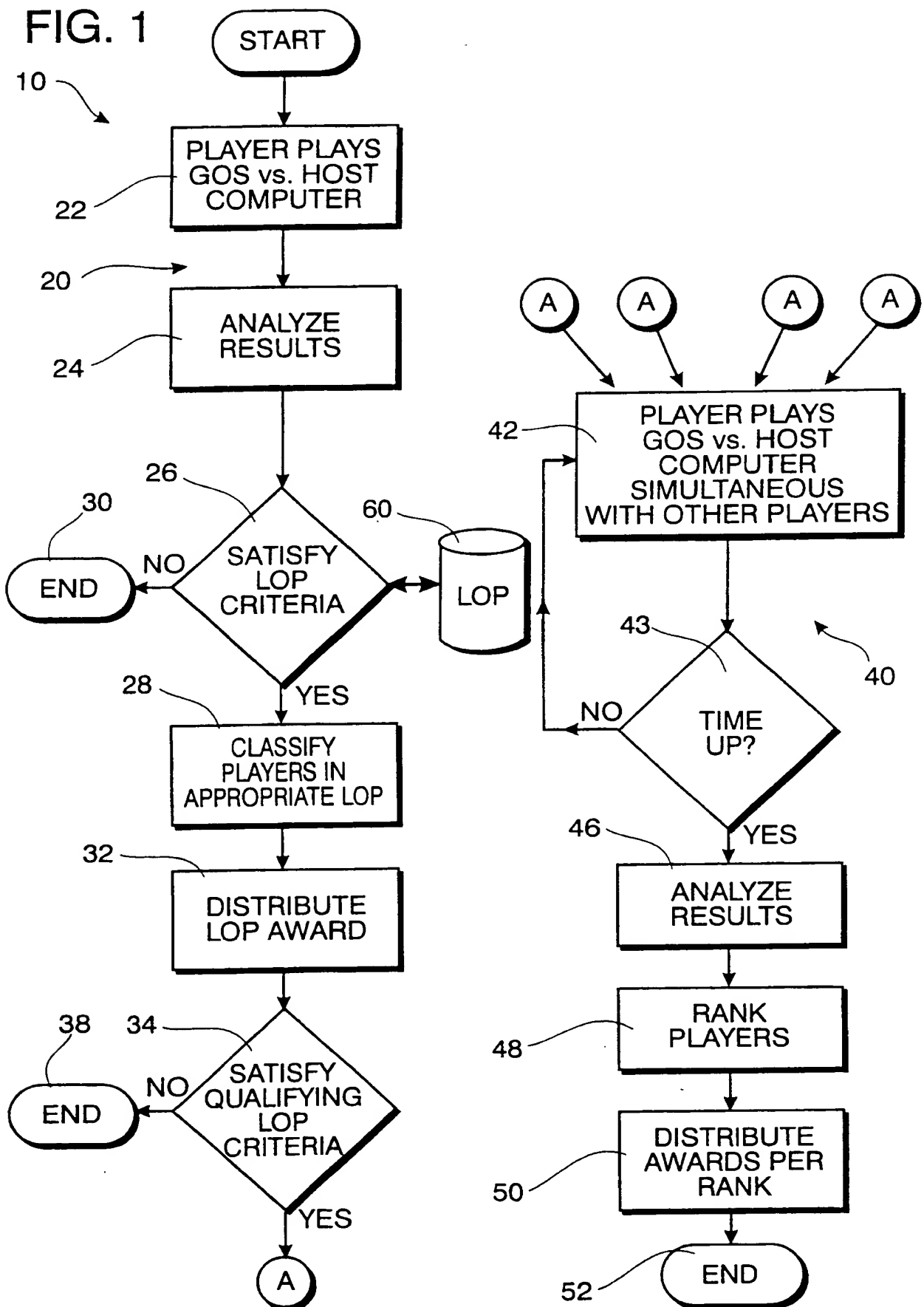
1 26. The method of claim 12 wherein said game of skill is based on the memory
2 reaction of the player.

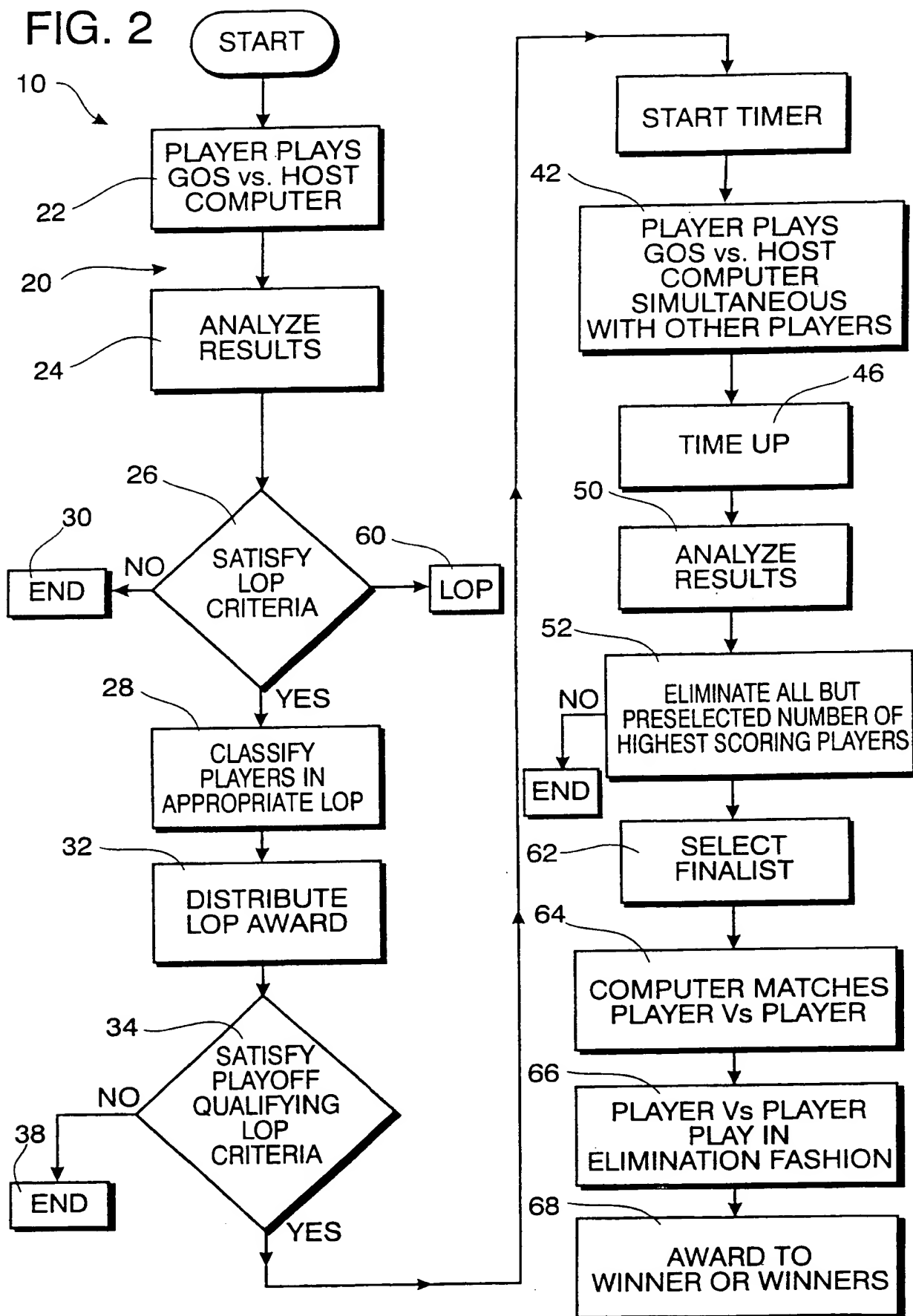
1 27. The method of claim 12 wherein said game of skill is based on the manual
2 dexterity and reaction time of the player.

1 28. The method of claim 12 wherein said playoff round is played at a predetermined
2 time and date.

1 29. The method of claim 12 wherein said playoff round is played for a
2 predetermined amount of time.

1 30. The method of claim 12 wherein said player can participate in said qualifying
2 round during a predetermined time frame.





INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 00/12714

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 A63F13/12

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 A63F G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	WO 97 27921 A (PTT LLC ; MARKS HOWARD M (US); SINGER ANTHONY M (US)) 7 August 1997 (1997-08-07)	1,5
Y	page 15, line 8 - line 13	13
A	page 46, line 14 - line 16 page 70, line 15 - line 19 page 72, line 21 - line 24 page 95, line 16 - line 18 page 98, line 1 - line 11 page 99, line 14 - page 100, line 9 figures 12,13,21,26 --- -/-	2,6,9,12

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
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X Y A	US 5 755 621 A (MARKS HOWARD M ET AL) 26 May 1998 (1998-05-26) column 11, line 40 - line 48 column 13, line 34 - line 60 column 14, line 30 - line 33 column 14, line 60 column 15, line 25 - column 16, line 4 figure 1 ----	12,20 13 1-5,10, 11,29,30
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X A	WO 97 19537 A (WALKER ASSET MANAGEMENT L P) 29 May 1997 (1997-05-29) page 1, line 16 - line 21 page 2, line 10 - line 31 page 14, line 5 - line 18 page 16, line 31 - page 17, line 5 page 49, line 26 - line 32 page 51, line 34 - page 52, line 5 page 60, line 22 - line 35 page 63, line 22 - line 28 figure 3 -----	1 2-5,7,9, 12,21-30

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Information on patent family members

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